

Minutes

Community Development Scrutiny Committee

10th August 2022



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Apologies	Mrs J Pell	Yes
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Yes
A Hensman	Yes	Mrs S Wilson	Apologies
Mrs A Kilmartin	Yes	B Wright	Yes
W Korsinah	Apologies		

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

INFORMATION: There were no Interests declared.

6 MINUTES

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee held on 4th May 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

INFORMATION: There were no statements made, or questions asked.

8 SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO MARKETS AND ASSOCIATED EVENTS WITHIN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – FIRST EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION

INFORMATION: In support of the Committee's first evidence gathering session, the Chairman was pleased to welcome two officers from the Council's Operations team to the meeting: Mr Steve Wilson, Operations Manager, and Mr Philip Taylor, Markets Superintendent, who were in attendance in order to provide Members with an overview of markets at the District Council.

During the presentation, officers made reference to the different services that played a role in the facilitation of markets and events, which included Operations, Economic Growth, Marketing and Communications, Licensing (Environmental Health) and Trading Standards (Essex County Council). The role of markets was also explained, along with the primary functions of the Operations team in overseeing the set-up and shutting down of markets, collecting rents from stall holders, liaising with stall holders, building good relations and the provision of a waste collection service. Other functions of the Operations team included the monitoring of stall holder compliance with the Market Terms and Conditions (including health and safety), liaising with other Council and external services

and vetting/validating new stall holders. The challenges posed to markets were also remarked upon, such as their recovery in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, increased competition from online shopping and supermarkets, poorer weather impacting on outdoor, uncovered markets in the Winter months, and resistance to change from some traditional market holders. Despite the challenges, there were also new opportunities emerging for local market stall holders; for example, following the pedestrianisation of Braintree Town Centre, opportunities for younger traders, the option to sell loose produce which was more environmentally friendly, etc.

During the presentation, Members were made aware of a typographical error on slide eight, the error of which regarded the 2021/22 figures: the deficit was “£16,000” not “£21,000.”

The full presentation may be viewed on the Council’s YouTube Channel via the following link:-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPlpabDW56k>

Following the presentation, Members were invited to ask their questions of officers. In response to the questions that were raised, the following information was provided:-

- The revenue generated from the District’s markets had dropped due to increasing numbers of people buying products online; however, other elements had also contributed to this decline, such as competition from supermarkets and cheaper discount stores.
- The Wednesday market was a chartered market and had always traditionally been slightly more expensive for market traders than that of the Saturday market.
- Many traders now used the option of card payment transactions rather than traditional cash payments, although it was underlined to Members that it was not a requirement for traders to use cashless payments; instead, this was the personal preference of the trader, as the income generated from the transactions formed part of their private business income, not the Council’s.
- It was explained that the Terms and Conditions for market stall holders were comprehensive and covered a number of aspects such as liability insurance, environmental, Trading Standards and any issues that arose during through the trading process. It was also added that the Council imposed its own terms and conditions on street market holders, the document of which could be accessed online.
- In respect of validating and vetting new stall holders, Members were advised that traders were required to possess liability insurance and comply with environmental health standards (e.g. for the selling of food). Representatives from Trading Standards also attended markets on an occasional basis who could help to assess and manage any issues that were to arise regarding the goods sold and weights and measures.
- The figures for the income generated from markets were always taken from the most recent financial year from April to March. The Covid-19 pandemic had had a significant impact on markets, with only the food markets able to be accessed during the height of the pandemic; however, officers were optimistic that market uptake in the District would rise to pre-Covid levels going forward (e.g. due to factors such as pedestrianisation).

- On the subject of encouraging more market traders to come back to the District, officers acknowledged that there was much cross-boundary competition. The aim was to ensure that there was a variety of market stalls to engender greater interest from the public, rather than a group of traders who each sold either similar or the same products. It was added that although the Council actively encouraged the return of traditional market traders, it could be difficult to do so or retain them as many traders (e.g. due to the Covid-19 pandemic) had left the business to seek other forms of income generation.
- Market officers worked closely with the Economic Growth team who were responsible for the promotion of market events and the different types of markets that were available.
- Market officers did occasionally visit and explore other markets outside of the District in order to compare their processes with the Council's own and perhaps identify new or improved ways of working. It was added that it would be worth speaking to officers in the Economic Growth team about their own work in examining markets elsewhere and the different traders they might have in place, as well the successes and drawbacks.
- In respect of the promotion of stalls and encouraging new traders, Members were advised that this fell under the remit of the Economic Growth team.
- Members were advised that the aim of markets was not to compete with local supermarkets and their products, but rather to offer something unique and attractive for customers that they wouldn't necessarily find elsewhere.
- It was confirmed that Braintree District Council was a member of the National Market Traders Association (NMTF), as well as the National Farmers Market. As a member, the Council was able to seek advice and support on the holding of markets where necessary, and it was also able to showcase the District's towns and as such attract other would-be market traders through its website and contact magazine.
- In relation to the NMTF, it was highlighted that one of the District's market traders had been taken forward for the Young Trader's Market campaign.
- In order to add to the diversity and variety of the District's markets, Members were advised that the Council was giving consideration towards appointing new farmer markets via the National Farmers Market network.
- In terms of parking and accessibility to markets, there were a variety of car park spaces available in Braintree town centre, with the George Yard Car Park and Victoria Square offering a large number of spaces, as well as disabled parking areas. In other areas such as Witham, the large Newlands Street car park was located close to the town centre and public transport links.
- The District's markets were advertised primarily through the Council's social media channels and bulletins (e.g. Your Market). Although the Council had previously advertised through magazines, this was a costly exercise and visitor numbers did not see a vast increase as a result.

- On the subject of advertising for new markets, such as farmers markets, it was advised that the Economic Growth team would be best placed to comment on how this was done.
- In response to a question regarding the size of the Witham Saturday market, Members were advised that the Saturday Witham market was currently comprised of eight stalls. In respect of the District's other markets, the number of trader stalls varied between 18 and 20.
- In response to a question regarding the fees payable by stall holders, Members were advised that there was not a vast difference in the fees charged to market stall holders at the monthly markets to those of more regular market traders.
- In terms of the monthly street markets, including when they commenced, the reasons for this, how traders were identified and whether there was a variation in the demand for stalls across the District's towns, Members were advised that this was a line of enquiry best responded to by the Economic Growth team.
- In respect of the monthly street markets, market traders had the option of paying their market fees online by card or upfront in advance of their trading day, although it was acknowledged that online payments were preferable in terms of security and work was being undertaken by the Economic Growth team to explore the options around this. The fees charged to regular market traders were normally collected on site by inspectors, as per tradition.
- The regulations around branding for specific markets was another area of enquiry best asked of the Economic Growth team.
- In response to a question raised about how the fees and charges for the District's market stalls compared with other Local Authority areas, Members were informed that they were reviewed each year but that further investigation was likely needed to establish how the rates compared elsewhere.

In response to the questions that were raised, the following actions were agreed:-

- It was agreed that a link to the Terms and Conditions for market stall traders would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting.
- Factors such as market footfall were normally monitored and measured by the Council's Economic Growth team. Mr Wilson agreed to defer to said team for a response.
- Mr Wilson agreed to conduct some research to see how the rates charged to market traders by other Local Authorities compared with that of Braintree's.
- It was suggested that Members visit the local markets to see what was on offer and gain a clearer understanding of how they worked.

At the end of the evidence gathering session, the Chairman expressed her grateful thanks to Mr Wilson and Mr Taylor for their presentation and responses to the questions raised by Members.

Members were then asked to give consideration to any further questions they would like to ask Mr Wilson and Mr Taylor in keeping with the Terms of Reference for the Scrutiny Review, and to submit any such questions to the Governance and Members team outside of the meeting.

Mr Wilson and Mr Taylor were then invited to leave the meeting if they so wished.

9 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO MARKETS AND ASSOCIATED EVENTS – ONLINE RESOURCES**

INFORMATION: The Chairman invited Miss J Mann, Governance and Members Officer, to introduce the report to the Committee. Members were subsequently advised that the report contained a list of online resources that had been identified by the Governance team which might be of benefit to Members in terms of their evidence gathering for the Scrutiny Review. Members were as such encouraged to read through the links provided.

Further to the report, Members were reminded that further lines of enquiry that they wished to pursue would need to be in keeping with the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Scrutiny Review, particularly if they wished to examine any comparative data from neighbouring market areas.

The following lines of enquiry were identified by Members for the Economic Growth team:-

- The Chairman was keen to learn more about how the organisation measured the town's footfall during regular markets when compared with the monthly street markets. The Chairman also wished to know whether officers possessed any information as to how Braintree's fees and charges compared with other markets, and if there were any reports available around differences in the demand for certain types of markets (e.g. food vs clothes) across the District's towns.
- The Chairman was also keen to learn more about the market associations that the District Council was a member of (e.g. the costs associated with that membership, whether there was value for money, etc).
- Members were also interested in the differences between private and chartered markets; for example, if the Council obtained any kind of revenue from privately held markets and what the standout features were of the various markets (e.g. street markets vs regular markets). For clarity, Members were advised that the markets were all chartered, and that responsibility for them fell to whoever held the charter. The District Council held the charter for the markets that took place on Wednesdays and Saturdays in Braintree and the Saturday market in Witham. In Halstead, the market charter was held by the Lord of the Manor and was managed by a private organisation.
- It was noted that survey and benchmarking information was available from the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA), and Members queried whether this could be explored further. Members were subsequently advised that this question would be submitted to both Economic Growth and Operations officers.
- In respect of the Young Traders Market campaign, the Chairman was keen to receive any information regarding the outcome of the regional finals and those traders who had participated.

- Members were also interested in obtaining any feedback or information in relation to the impacts of Brexit on market traders (e.g. supply of stock).

On the subject of market charters, Members were advised the market charters themselves often dated back to manorial documents, and copies were as such difficult to obtain; for instance, the Braintree market charters dated back to 11th Century.

Members were then reminded of the limited timeframe in which the Committee had to conduct its Scrutiny Review and were asked to give consideration to any other witnesses that they wished to invite to future meetings. It was highlighted that officers from the Council's Economic Growth team had already been invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee on 31st August 2022: the officers were Emma Goodings (Head of Economic Growth and Planning) and Louise Raine (Economic Development Support Officer).

The following potential future witnesses for the Scrutiny Review were also identified:-

- Councillor Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth;
- Representatives from the National Market Traders Association (NMTF) and National Farmers Market to provide a greater explanation as to the support streams and guidance that they offered to their members;
- Officers from the Council's Marketing and Communications teams to provide further detail about how the Council's social media channels were used to promote the various markets (e.g. screenshots, number of views received, etc) to wider groups of people, and;
- Any market traders that would be interested in attending a future meeting of the Committee to share their views and experiences. Alternatively, if the traders were unavailable, it was suggested that a list of the Committee's questions be submitted to them for written response instead.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.48pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)